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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 002472

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [ECON](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: A/S ROCCA'S DECEMBER 16 MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

REF: A. A. KATHMANDU 1805

[B](#). B. USDAO KATHMANDU IIR 6867 0028 03

Classified By: Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca for reasons 1.5 (B,D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On December 16, Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, accompanied by Ambassador Malinowski, met with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to discuss Nepal-U.S. bilateral relations and Nepal's ongoing Maoist insurgency. Thapa expressed the GON's appreciation for USG assistance with the Maoist insurgency. Rocca stressed the importance of the Government of Nepal (GON) upholding high standards on human rights, indicating that violations could affect U.S. security assistance. Thapa assured A/S Rocca that human rights were an area of mutual concern. Thapa assured A/S Rocca that proposed "Village Defense Committees" are intended to "re-motivate" villagers with a higher security presence. Thapa stated that the King is committed to holding elections within the next six months and expressed hope that the political parties will join the Government following an official announcement of elections. The Prime Minister, A/S Rocca and Ambassador also discussed Bhutanese refugees, Nepal's entry into the WTO and SAARC. End Summary.

Human Rights

[1](#)2. (C) On December 16, Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, accompanied by Ambassador Malinowski, met with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to discuss Nepal-U.S. bilateral relations and Nepal's ongoing Maoist insurgency. Thapa explained that Nepal is undergoing two crises: the Maoist insurgency and the lack of consensus between the Government of Nepal (GON) and the political parties. Thanking A/S Rocca for USG support to counter the insurgency, Thapa requested that the U.S. continue to provide military and other assistance to combat the problem. A/S Rocca responded that continued USG support would be affected if the GON failed to take a strong stand to protect human rights according to international standards. Noting the recent incident in Ramechhap (ref A), A/S Rocca said that although the Maoists commit frequent abuses, Nepal's security forces must be held to a higher standard. A/S Rocca requested that Thapa pass the message to all involved parties that human rights are important for future cooperation and assistance. Thapa acknowledged that promoting and preserving human rights are areas of mutual concern. Indicating that the GON had heard this message from many donors in Nepal, Thapa stated that Nepal is committed to human rights--a commitment demonstrated in its various human rights cells within the security forces. Noting that an investigation is underway on the Ramechhap incident, Thapa indicated that appropriate action will be taken once findings are complete.

Clarification on the Proposed "Civic Peace
and Development Mobilization Committee"

[1](#)3. (C) A/S Rocca asked Thapa to clarify the "Village Defense Committee," now known as "Civic Peace and Development Mobilization Committee" (ref B), asking if the GON plans to create a militia or to arm civilians, as news reports allege. Thapa responded, "As you know, the press here is not reliable. They have a tendency to distort facts and manufacture truths." He explained that the concept is not intended to aggravate the conflict further by arming civilians. Instead, the purpose is to establish a security presence in the villages and to "re-motivate" the villagers. (Note: Royal Nepalese Army officials clarified this statement later. See RNA briefing information septel. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (C) Saying he wanted to debunk rumors that the GON is becoming an increasingly militarized state, Thapa assured A/S Rocca that the military remains under the control of a civilian committee. This committee, which he as Prime

Minister chairs, is responsible for directing military operations and the movement of security forces around Nepal. (Note: The PM is technically correct in saying the Army is run by a civilian authority, which he chairs. What he neglected to say, however, is that the only other member of that committee is the Chief of Army Staff. Despite their status as Chairmen of the National Defense Committee, Prime Ministers historically have had little or no role in directing military operations. The King wields the ultimate authority over the Army in his capacity as Head of State and as Supreme Commander. End Note.)

Committed to Elections

15. (C) Thapa said that the GON is committed to a "road map" of socio-economic and political development. Aspects of this road map, according to Thapa, include ensuring village security, delivering needed services and combating corruption. The ultimate goal of the road map is to hold both municipal and parliamentary elections. Thapa indicated that the GON has made several overtures to political parties to join the Government in the fight against the Maoists. During the cease-fire negotiations, Thapa claimed that GON made it a point to notify and consult with the party leaders. The political parties, according to Thapa, have assured the GON that they will participate and support both local and parliamentary elections when they are held. Thapa said he believes that once there is a formal declaration of elections, the parties will rejoin the Government. A/S Rocca replied that cooperation between the GON and political parties was essential in order to deny the Maoists the opportunity to exploit partisan differences.

16. (C) Thapa says he expects elections sometime within the next six months, but noted that this needs to be discussed with the newly appointed Election Commissioner. Endorsing the GON's commitment to work with the political parties on elections, A/S Rocca questioned whether security would be a prerequisite for holding elections. Thapa stated that it would be best if the Maoists went back to the negotiating table and noted that the King has set a deadline of six months to restart negotiations. Even if this does not happen, Thapa emphasized that the King is committed to holding elections in a phased manner and transferring power back to the people.

17. (C) Thapa requested continued USG cooperation on security assistance. A/S Rocca explained that the FY 2004 budget would not be finalized until early February 2004 at the earliest. Noting that USG assistance levels are being scaled back around the world, A/S Rocca stressed that it was too early to tell what the levels for Nepal might be, she indicated that the GON should be prepared to settle for less assistance as a result of this trend. She added that since human rights and democratization issues are the utmost concern in all levels of the USG, GON should make an strong effort to show its commitment on these matters.

Other Issues:
Bhutanese Refugees, WTO, SAARC

18. (C) Thapa expressed the GON's appreciation for the USG's support for Bhutanese refugee repatriation and on Nepal's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). A/S Rocca said that the USG is committed to a long-term solution to the Bhutanese refugee problem, noting that there were a number of matters to be resolved like the registration and resettlement of those repatriated to Bhutan. From recent meetings with Bhutanese officials in association with the upcoming SAARC Summit, Thapa said he believes that the Bhutanese Government is interested in solving this matter. With regard to WTO, the Ambassador and A/S expressed their congratulations to Thapa on Nepal entering the WTO.

19. (C) Although Thapa indicated that he was initially concerned that Indo-Pakistani relations would cloud dialogue, he is now confident that the SAARC Summit in Islamabad, January 4-6, will be a success. A/S Rocca agreed that SAARC is a potential important building block of the Indo-Pakistani bilateral relationship. She endorsed SAARC as a mechanism not only to improve the dialogue between India and Pakistan, but also to lift the economic and political levels of all member countries. The Ambassador and A/S Rocca wished Thapa well on his final meetings in Bangladesh and the Maldives to complete coordination on the proposed South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

COMMENT

110. (C) A/S Rocca's emphasis on the importance of human rights is especially timely, as the Royal Nepal Army reopens

its investigation into the incidents at Ramechhap. Given the persistent climate of mistrust between the GON and the political parties, as well as the shaky security situation, we find the suggestions that elections can be held in six months overly optimistic. Before the elections can occur, there must be some glimmer of reconciliation between the parties and the GON. Not only would the parties have to agree to participate, but they also would need time to rebuild the party organizations that have been shattered across the countryside by Maoist violence. End Comment.

11. (U) A/S Rocca has cleared this cable.
MALINOWSKI